Special Prosecutor Richard Sprague has taken on the crucial task of discovering who really killed John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. And already, sinister forces are trying to stop him . . .

WHO'S TRYING ASSASSINATION

By William Hoffer

Someone is trying to kill the assassination committee. Last year Congress authorized, by a vote of 280 to 65, the establishment of the House Select Committee on Assassinations. Its orders were simple: "To conduct a full and complete investigation of the circumstances surrounding the death of John F. Kennedy and the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., and any others the Select Committee shall determine."

It's a big job. But it's one the public has been crying for ever since Friday, Nov. 22, 1963, when President Kennedy was cut down in Dallas. More nagging questions were raised when King died in Memphis in 1968. The American people have a clear right to know the circumstances behind these violent deaths. More than a right—they have a deep need to know. For until these murders are solved, the nation will continue to be torn with doubts and fears about the mysterious, shadowy happenings within its government.

After a nationwide search, the committee chose a tough prosecutor as its chief investigator. His name is Richard A. Sprague, a soft-spoken but determined 51-year-old Philadelphia lawyer. As a district attorney for Philadelphia County he prosecuted more than 10,000 criminal cases. In 60 first degree murder cases he obtained the death penalty 20 times. He became a national figure when he served as Special Prosecutor for Washington County, Pennsylvania, for the investigation of the vicious murders of United Mine Workers figure Joseph Yablonski and his family. Later, as Special Assistant to the Attorney General of the United States, he obtained the conviction of former United Mine Workers President W.A. "Tony" Boyle in the Yablonski murder.

"This new inquiry into the Kennedy and King assassinations really grew out of the Watergate era," Sprague explains. "Part of the revelations associated with Watergate involved errors and violations and cover ups by the FBI and the CIA. We learned that there seemed to be deliberate suppression of evidence in the investigation of the Kennedy assassination.

"And any thinking human being would have to be concerned about the King case. The investigators allowed James Earl Ray to

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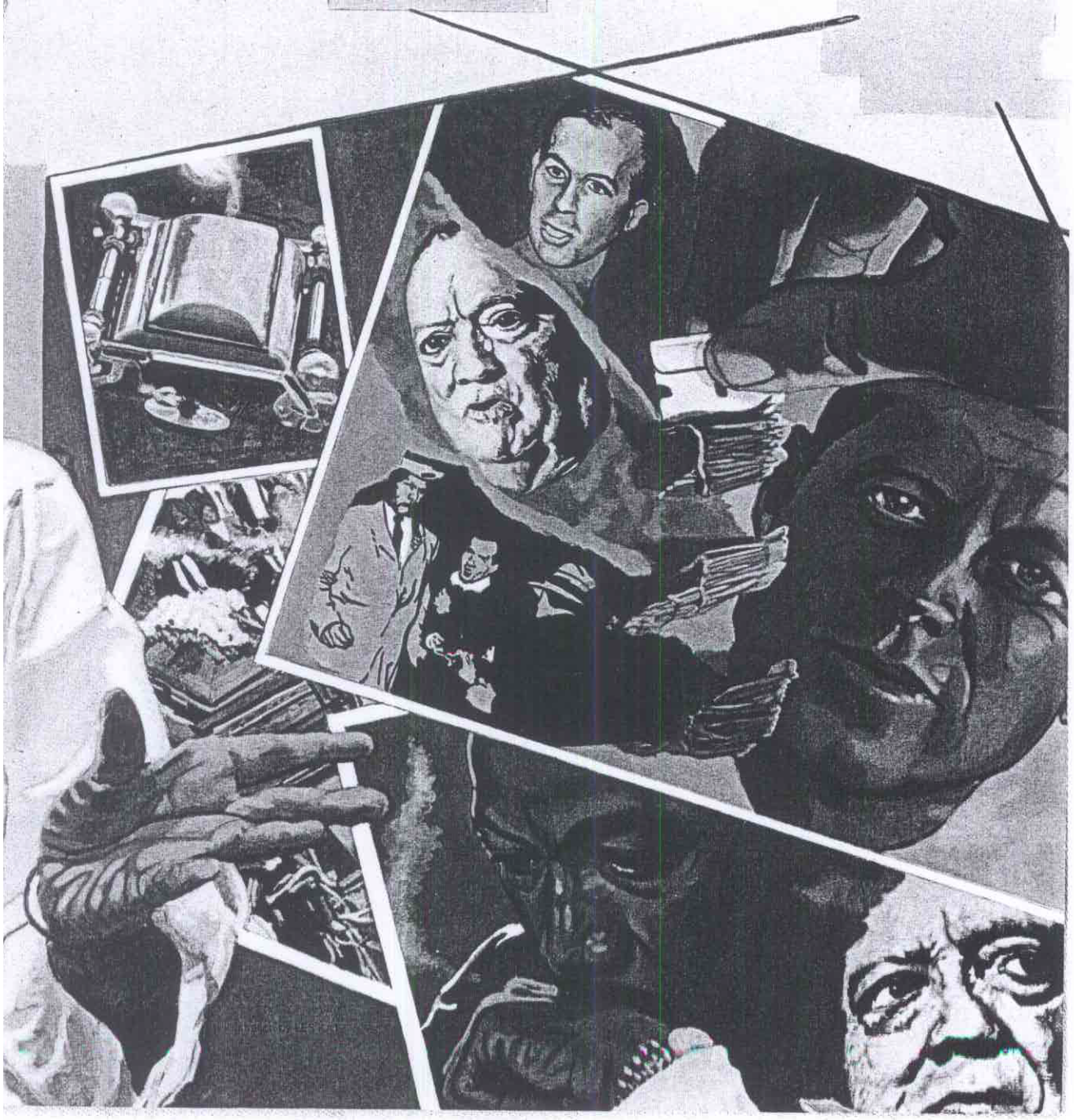
TO KILL THE COMMITTEE?



ASSASSINATION PROBER

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plead guilty to the killing without ever obtaining a full confession from him. He never told the whole story. The entire case has never been fully investigated. This, plus the more recent revelations of the hate campaign waged against King by J. Edgar Hoover, calls for a thorough study."

Sprague refuses to disclose any details that have surfaced in the first three months of his investigation. He admits, however, that he has uncovered enough new evidence concerning the Kennedy assassination "that makes it imperative that the investigation be continued."

As for the King case, there are reports that James Earl Ray is ready to testify before the committee. Sprague will not confirm the rumors, but will not deny them either.

And so it seems that the American public may be on the verge of finally learning the truth about the killings. Was there a conspiracy to kill President Kennedy? What role did Cuban militants play in the mysterious journeys of Lee Harvey Oswald? Why did the CIA and the FBI withhold evidence from the Warren Commission? What connection did Jack Ruby have with Oswald, with the FBI, with the CIA? How many guns were really used? Why did the FBI destroy documents concerning Oswald? How did James Earl Ray get the money to leave the country after the King killing? What information did the FBI obtain from its bugging of Dr. King's private conversations? And what caused Ray to keep quiet all these years?

If the killings were not the isolated acts of single assassins—but *if* they really were conspiracies—then it is only logical to assume that there are sinister forces in America today who desperately want to hush up the investigation of the assassination committee. *If* that is so, we could expect them to make a determined attempt to stop the investigation fast.

"No one is attacking the need for the studies," Sprague acknowledges. "That would not be a popular thing to do. Instead, we are seeing a smoke screen thrown up. We are being faced with a whole range of objections that are attacking the methods of the committee. Some of them are nothing but red herrings."

First, the committee is being attacked on the basis of its proposed budget. Not a bureaucrat, Sprague merely determined how many investigators and support workers he would need, calculated their salaries, figured in office and overhead expenses, and announced to Congress that the committee would require $6,530,050 for the first year of what would probably be a two-year job.

"It blew my hat off," commented retiring Cong. Thomas Downing (D-Va.), the original chairman of the committee.

When the new Congress convened in January several members began to argue against the budget. Sprague had made a "mistake" in his manner of approach. "Several people around here who are familiar with the bureaucratic game urged me to come in first with a much smaller budget," Sprague says. "They assured me that I could always go back to Congress later and plead for more. That's the way they do things around Washington. But I won't play that game. Six million is what we need, so that's what I told them."

Sprague points out that when the Warren Commission investigated the Kennedy assassination it employed a staff of 83 people for 10 months. In addition, the commission used the services of 150 full-time FBI agents, 60 full-time Secret Service agents, 12 full- and part-time CIA agents, and the back up staffs and facilities of the Justice and State Departments. But the very nature of this inquiry makes it essential that other government investigators are not involved. FBI and CIA agents will be prime subjects of investigation. Sprague says that if his committee depended upon any government agency it would be "the laughingstock of the world."

This committee must do its own work. And Sprague believes that will be a full-time job for 170 people over a two-year period. Those investigators will be required to travel around the world tracking down leads. Twenty-eight percent of the budget is reserved for travel expenses. "There's no halfway part in this thing," Sprague argues. "It's either got to be done thoroughly or you don't do it."

House Speaker Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill (D-Mass.) supports the budget. Richardson Preyer (D-N.C.) thought about the size of the budget, then commented "You get what you pay for."

But other congressmen are not so sure. There is a distinct undercurrent on Capitol Hill that the assassination committee budget is too high and that it must be cut drastically. Some of the feeling may be legitimate concern for spending. But some of it might result from fears about what the committee might uncover. Sprague acknowledges that if someone did not want the committee to do its work it would be easy to attack on the basis of the budget request. That issue will come to a head over the next few months as Congress debates the budget.

But money is not the only issue. Others have worried that the committee

will trample on the civil rights of people whom it investigates. There are dark whispers of wiretapping, bugging, and misuse of lie detectors and the newer stress evaluators that attempt to determine credibility by analyzing voice patterns.

"All of these objections are being raised about things that have never happened," Sprague says in disbelief. "Critics are saying that we *might* do these things, not that we have. It's nonsense. I'm an attorney. I do my work within the law. I always have. There's never been any such accusation against me before. We're not going to bug people without their knowledge.

"You're taping my conversation right now," he commented. "You're sitting here with a tape recorder in the open where I can see it. I know you are recording, and I consent to it. That is exactly what we will do with witnesses. And we will have them sign a form which clearly states that we may wish to submit the tape to analysis by a stress evaluator and that the subject authorizes such use. We will operate totally within the law. This investigation, perhaps more than any other, demands it. I don't think that lie detectors and stress evaluators are infallible. I would not use either one in a court of law. But as an investigative tool, they are valuable."

Some controversy was raised when the committee reportedly purchased two tiny microphones that can be hidden upon the investigator's body. Sprague admits that the use of these could be abused. But he has a legitimate reason for buying them.

"We are lawyers," he explains. "We are not cops. Certain parts of these investigations are going to lead us toward some rough people. For example, we will be interviewing certain figures in the world of organized crime. If one of our men gets into a rough situation, I want him to be able to call for help. That's the purpose of these two microphones."

"What organized crime figures will you be investigating?" I asked.

"I can't tell you right now. But there have been reports that the government was approaching organized crime to offer 'contracts' to assassinate Castro. We are going to have to check those reports out thoroughly."

Sprague's job is one of the most difficult ever handed to a special prosecutor. He will probably be criticized every step of the way. Previous investigations of the two murders were wholly unsatisfactory. This committee cannot afford to botch the job.

The results of the investigation will come to light little by little. As the team documents the truth or falsehood of any

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particular accusation, Sprague plans to hold open hearings to present the evidence to the full committee and to the American public at the same time. It will not be a criminal trial as such, yet every American citizen will be sitting on the jury.

Sprague's footsteps will be dogged every step of the way. He will have to work hard to justify every penny. He will have to prove his case so conclusively that the answers are clear. And the closer he gets to the truth, the more "red herrings" are likely to be thrown at him.

He may even have to fight the FBI and CIA. One morning recently he learned that the FBI had asked the National Archives to turn over the bullets from the Kennedy assassination so that they could make further ballistics tests. "With the FBI clearly a subject of the investigation, could you imagine the reaction of the public if FBI agents were to get ahold of those bullets?" Sprague says. The FBI request was turned down.

The old radiators in Sprague's ancient office began to pound as water poured through them. Outside, Washington's new Metro subway system roared by, making conversation impossible for a moment. Sprague turned in his chair and tugged at his tie.

"Let's talk some more about these 'red herrings,' " I said. "We could imagine various reasons why certain people would not want the investigation to proceed. Some people could legitimately be concerned about the budget and about surveillance measures. But we could also imagine some very sinister reasons."

"I won't speculate on that," Sprague replied.

"You can't speculate on it?"

"No. I said I won't speculate on it."

"Can you rule out sinister motives?"

Sprague looked at me very directly. "At this point," he said, "I won't rule out anything." ★